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AUTHOR	Malen, Betty; Muncey, Donna
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ABSTRACT

Since the 1970s, states have substantially and dramatically increased their involvement in education while simultaneously endorsing notions of local control. This paper focuses on the impact of such persistent and pervasive state activism on school autonomy. It describes how the proliferation and accumulation of education policies enacted at the state level may be affecting organizational discretion at the site level. It offers a brief discussion of the conceptual perspectives and data sources that support the analysis and the major limitations of the approach. The paper provides an overview of how this topic can be treated in the literature and illustrates how prominent characterizations may underestimate the power of the state by outlining an alternative hypothesis, assessing it, and highlighting the implications of this analysis for future research. The paper suggests why educators should and how they might revisit the relationship between state activism and school autonomy. One of the major, cumulative effects of the proliferation and intensification of state policymaking may well be to substantially constrain site autonomy. (Contains 134 references.) (DFR)

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Exploring the Tensions between State Activism and School Autonomy

by

Betty Malen
University of Maryland, College Park

and

Donna Muncey
St. Mary's College

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Since the 1970's, states have substantially, at times dramatically, increased their involvement in education while simultaneously endorsing notions of local control. This paper focuses on the impact of such persistent and pervasive state activism on school autonomy. Our purpose is to describe how the proliferation and accumulation of education policies enacted at the state level may be affecting organizational discretion at the site level. We begin with a brief discussion of the conceptual perspectives and data sources that undergird our analysis and the major limitations of our approach. [1] Then we provide an overview of how this topic has been treated in the literature, illustrate how prominent characterizations may underestimate the power of the state, outline an alternative hypothesis, assess it and highlight the implications of this analysis for future research. In essence, the paper suggests why we should and how we might revisit the relationship between state activism and school autonomy.

Conceptual Perspectives, Data Sources and Limitations

Our analysis reflects a set of assumptions about the nature of power, the ability of institutional actors to exert influence on units of the system, the indicators used to gauge the autonomy of schools, and the scope of judgements rendered. First, power is viewed as multidimensional. That is, it may be exercised through fairly direct and highly visible regulatory strategies (e.g., establishing rules, allocating or withholding resources, applying sanctions) and through less direct or more subtle symbolic processes (e.g., controlling agendas, shaping expectations, altering perceptions of problems, priorities, and possibilities).

Second, the relative power of actors at the state and site level is manifest in their ability to exercise influence on education policy. It is evidenced by their ability to initiate as well as react, advance as well as constrain, actions during the various stages of policy articulation, formulation and implementation (Mazzoni, 1991; Malen & Ogawa, 1988; Kingdon, 1984). In other words, the relative power of actors can be gauged in part by the roles they assume, or prompt others to assume, during various phases of policymaking.

Third, the autonomy afforded organizations like schools can be assessed in a variety of ways (Boyne, 1993; Davies & Henschke, 1991). Given the complexity of the phenomenon, we incorporate multiple indicators. These include (a) the degree of formal authority site actors have to make binding decisions about critical aspects of their organization, (b) the web of rules embedded in the federal, state or district policies, a web that encompasses the obligations as well as the regulations that circumscribe what individual schools may or must do (Boyne, 1993), (c) the availability of resources at the disposal of site actors, and (d) the strength of various rewards or sanctions that individual schools may anticipate or higher authorities may impose. Taken

together, these indicators help reveal whether and how schools may set their own directions as well as deliver required services.[2]

Fourth, the autonomy or degree of discretion afforded organizations, like schools, is contingent on many contextual and institutional factors, including policies emanating from various levels of the system. Simply put, schools are nested in complex social, cultural, and political contexts that can reinforce or counteract the power of state policies. Schools are also subject to a host of federal and district policies that may complement or contradict state policies and operate to enhance or restrict site autonomy. These factors complicate efforts to gauge the impact of state activism on site autonomy.

Fifth, assessments of the relative power of institutional actors and the potential impact of these power configurations on school autonomy are confined to the nature, not the merits of these arrangements. Our intent is to characterize rather than criticize or justify the governance dimensions of the state-site relationship.

Our analysis is necessarily suggestive. It relies heavily on a systematic review of articles based on case studies of state education policy implementation conducted from the late 1970's to the mid-1990s, as well as in progress studies of the implementation of various education reforms. While case study data can reveal the multiple, often subtle ways state influence may be exercised or circumscribed, they can not capture universal trends. Since some settings have been studied rather extensively while others have not, it is hard to know what patterns may be typical and what patterns may be exceptional.[3] And, since there are few multi-level, longitudinal studies, the ability to track state influence on sites over time is constrained. It is difficult to discern, for example, whether state influence may be episodic or enduring, incidental or incremental.

Further, states differ in their approaches to education reform (Mazzoni, 1994; Fuhrman, 1988). Their reform initiatives embody diverse priorities and strategies.[4] They vary in their comprehensiveness and aggressiveness as well as in their consistency, prescriptiveness, and persuasiveness (Tyree, 1993). Insofar as the features of policy affect the strength of policy, different packages of state policies may have quite different consequences for site autonomy.

Moreover, the literature documents considerable variation in local responses to state actions (Fuhrman & Elmore, 1995; Fuhrman, 1994; McLaughlin, 1987). In so doing, the literature often blurs the distinctions between district and site reactions to state policies. Although scholars acknowledge the "profound differences in how local schools make sense of [and respond to] state initiated changes" (Rossman & Wilson, 1996:416), it is difficult to

distinguish between district and site reactions to state policies, especially when reports of case studies combine them under the generic category of "local responses." The detailed description required to differentiate district and site responses is often not available in the published pieces. For that reason, we sometimes refer to districts and sites as objects of state activity and examine the more generic "local responses" to state policy. However, the literature also portrays the district as a pivitol actor that can align with the state to restrict (or expand) site autonomy. Thus we also treat districts as arms or extensions of the state where that appears to be their major role.[5]

Finally, interpretations of power depend, in part, on one's vantage point. For example, state governments lament their inability to control sites while local agents resent the intrusion of the state. Both "takes" seem to "ring true" for actors in different positions of the system. Because this paper focuses on studies of policy implementation, it tends to see power from the ground up, that is, from the vantage point of site actors. Hence it may be more sensitive to perceptions of state invasiveness than accounts of local evasiveness.

Prominent Views of State Activism and Site Autonomy

While writings on this topic contain diverse findings and interpretations, a central thesis in the literature is that state activism does not constitute a credible threat to local autonomy. For example, policy implementation studies carried out over the last three decades often indicate that educators at the district and site have the opportunity, inclination and ingenuity required to effectively insulate the school and the people who work in it from a host of policies imposed from afar. The idea that "street-level bureaucrats" (Lipsky, 1980) could unmake or remake policy faster than policy could influence organizational priorities and practices seems to capture the realities and, for some, the frustrations of state attempts to influence schools (Weatherly & Lipsky, 1977; Elmore, 1983; Malen & Hart, 1987; Rossman & Wilson, 1996). Whether the source of directives is federal, state, or district officials, it appears, to some, that the school site may be virtually untouchable. As Schon put it, when "outsiders" attempt to gain control through regulatory means, the efforts usually precipitate "games of control and escape from control...[wherein] locals are always able to foil or transform ... distort or resist [the directives]" (1981:59). Other scholars reach similar conclusions, albeit for different reasons.

For instance, Cohen and Spillane, relying less on individual gamesmanship and more on organizational structures to account for the preservation of local autonomy amidst intensified policy activity in the broader system write: "the US political system was specifically designed to frustrate central power. Authority in education was divided among state, local and federal governments by

an elaborate federal system and it was divided within governments by the separation of powers" (1992:5). Commenting on federal and state policy activity in the 1960s and 1970s, they add:

> New educational policies expanded central authority and drew the agencies of policy and practice closer together. But these policies did not commensurately reduce the autonomy of 'lower level' agencies [particularly in the domains of curriculum and instruction]. The flood of state and federal policies and programs coursed through a large and loosely jointed governance system, and agencies throughout the system retain much of their operating independence.... Despite the increasing flow of higher-level requirements, advice and inducements, lower level agencies have much room to interpret and respond" (Cohen & Spillane, 1992:8-9).

Others, like Rossman and Wilson point to the strength of local cultures, deeply ingrained norms, rituals and "sacred" values to explain why "feisty, challenging responses to state-initiated mandates are alive and well in the local schools" (1996:417). The idea that various combinations of "local forces" can overwhelm state policies has been broadly endorsed and essentially cast as a "lesson" that policymakers ought to heed (McLaughlin, 1987).

Although multiple policy implementation studies offered different explanations for findings, they documented and at times bemoaned the apparent inability of state governments to effectively influence school systems. As these writings accumulated, it seemed that state efforts to reform schools by "remote control" (Cuban, 1984) were doomed to modest, if not minuscule, impact. The various combinations of wit and wizardry site actors used to duck and dodge directives, to create the appearance of compliance, or to convert new initiatives into conventional practices lent credence to observations that "schools change reforms as much as reforms change schools" (Cuban, 1998:453).

The power of the state has been open to question not simply because studies of local responses to state initiatives tend to emphasize "the power of the bottom over the top" (Elmore, 1983). Various analyses of state actions revealed that states were not deploying the full range of strategies required for policy initiatives to take hold (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987) or aligning policies in ways that would allow them to complement and reinforce rather than undermine or offset each other (Smith & O'Day, 1991; O'Day & Smith, 1993, Fuhrman, 1993). But even when states adopted more comprehensive, and purportedly more coherent approaches to education policy, the pattern of local responses suggested that both district and site actors made selective use of state policies. Local units embraced some initiatives and ignored others. While some state policies (most notably high-stakes testing and related accountability policies) penetrated the boundaries of school systems, others did not (Firestone, et al., 1992).

The intriguing cases of creative defiance, the recurrent patterns of uneven implementation, the perennial problem of "local variation" (McLaughlin, 1987; Fuhrman & Elmore, 1995) and the apparent tendency of districts "to use policies that fit their own plans and fight the reforms that did not" (Firestone, et. al., 1992:271) suggested that although states might have become involved in education policy, districts and sites tended to retain a protective armor that enabled them to deflect, diffuse and otherwise minimize the influence of state actions. The findings of early implementation studies have been reiterated as scholars continued to report that, for a host of reasons, "authoritative direction and responsive compliance turn out to be the exception. The best that can usually be expected of efforts to get districts [and, by extension, sites] to implement state and federal policy is mutual adaptation through which central expectations adapt to local preferences at least as much as the opposite occurs" (Firestone, et. al 1992:257).

The power of the state was further challenged by findings that suggest local actors may have initiated education reforms quite apart from the pressure or persuasion of the state (F. M. Hess, 1999; Fuhrman & Elmore, 1990). For example, F. M. Hess argues that local districts have adopted "an endless stream of policy initiatives" (1999:52) for reasons more closely associated with "professional reputation" and "community prestige" than state activism.[6] Other scholars point to settings where local action preceded state action, to districts that exceeded state expectations for compliance and to situations where state policy may have been issued top-down, but was effectively crafted "bottom-up," because local actors provided ideas for and exercised considerable influence on the design of state reforms (Hertert, 1996; Elmore & Sykes, 1992; Firestone, 1989). Using these sorts of developments to gauge the impact of state activism on local autonomy, some scholars conclude that state policy has "left not only considerable room for [local] flexibility but also enhanced local activism...The busier states became, the busier local districts became; everyone made more policy, and the arena of governance expanded" (Fuhrman & Elmore,1990:82). In this view, state activity has not substantially eclipsed local autonomy as the "zero sum model" of inter-governmental relations might predict; rather, the state-local relationship is judged to be one of "mutual influence" (Fuhrman & Elmore, 1990:83; Elmore & Fuhrman, 1995; Kirst, 1995a; Spillane, 1996).

Potential Limitations of the Prominent Thesis

While the prominent thesis is persuasive, it may represent a limited, potentially distorted characterization of the state-local relationship. Indications of mutual influence do not necessarily translate into patterns of symmetrical influence or even meaningful influence. Indeed, patterns of reciprocal influence, mutual adaptation, intensified action, and "street-level" transformation

of policy may understate, even obfuscate, the manner in which state activism may be substantially constraining site autonomy. We focus on four ways the prominent view may be minimizing the power of the state.

Underestimating the Impact of Agenda Control

Over the last three decades, state officials have often dominated if not essentially controlled the education reform agenda (McDonnell & Fuhrman, 1986; Mazzoni, 1994). While "setting the agenda is not the same as getting one's way" (Kingdon, 1984:24), the "ability to determine the official organizational agenda is one of the most important sources of institutional power" (Fischer, 1990:288). Indeed, those who control the agenda may well wield the "supreme instrument of power," the ability to define the issues and alternatives that will get governmental attention, consideration and support (Schattsneider, 1960). While it may be true that "Administrators and teachers usually can tailor higher level programs to local purposes and conditions, if they have the will and take the time" (Cohen & Spillane 1992:11), the focus is on accommodating state priorities and "correcting" state policies more than determining school priorities and creating site policies.

Equating Ingenuity with Autonomy

Accounts of how site actors subvert state initiatives or accounts of how state policies spawn local activity may be a reflection of the ingenuity more than the autonomy of local actors. The ability of local actors, notably teachers, to convert merit pay and career ladder policies into uniform salary increases and familiar staffing practices is a telling case in point (Malen & Hart, 1987). In this case, state officials controlled the agenda. Educators had very little influence on reform inputs. A merit pay/career ladder statute was initiated, promoted and enacted despite the resistance of local educators (Malen & Campbell, 1985). While educators, notably teachers, secured some concessions and inserted some protections that enabled them to substantially influence reform outcomes during the implementation phase, they were in a reactive posture, maneuvering within the narrow parameters set by the new state rules and the limited state funds. The state policy spawned a lot of local activity, but much, if not most, of that activity was in anticipation of or in reaction to state overtures. The fact that site actors had some opportunity to remake policy turned out to be an indication of their limited, and arguably endangered autonomy. Considerable energy was devoted to sorting through the confusion, figuring out how to address the goals set by others, searching for ways to accommodate the policy or remedy the problems associated with it. In short, the "opportunity" and, in the minds of some site actors, the necessity of remaking state policy can divert attention from and undermine the ability to advance site level initiatives (Malen & Hart, 1987). Apparently this case is not unique (Kirp & Driver, 1995).

Casting the Exception as the Rule

Accounts of "assertive districts" (Hertert, 1996:383) that influence the development of state education policies or seemingly progressive districts that "take pride in being ahead of the state on most reforms" (Hertert, 1996:384) can make the exception appear to be the rule. In one study, more than 80% of the districts in the sample were not able to either "influence state policies or to insulate themselves from their effects...[The majority of districts] perceive state policies as having a significant impact on their daily operations and priorities" (Hertert,1996:384). Other studies indicate that since the early 1980's, state governments have enacted education reforms without the endorsement and, in many instances, despite the objections of local units (McDonnell & Fuhrman, 1986; Mazzoni, 1991; Mazzoni, 1994; Pipho, 1991). These findings cast doubt on the ability of a vast number of local units to effectively direct or redirect state initiatives or to otherwise secure the legislative influence that select, "assertive districts" may have exercised.

Overlooking the Possibility of Implicit Influence

In settings where state action did not appear to stifle local activity or where local districts appeared to be charting the course for state education reform, the state could have been wielding considerable "implicit influence" (Dahl, 1980:25). That is, local units may have been developing policies in <u>anticipation</u> of state action, if not in response to state action. Either way, the state may be exercising influence in ways that effectively narrow the range of local options and ultimately restrict site autonomy. As earlier noted, local activity around the career ladder reform in Utah was both in anticipation of and in response to state action. Perhaps that explains some, if not all, the activity in districts that appear to be initiating their own reforms.

In these four ways, and perhaps in other ways, prominent views of the relationship between state activism and site autonomy may be underestimating the power of the state. Thus, we explore an alternative view.

<u>An Alternative Hypothesis</u>

Recognizing that state activism is not necessarily equivalent to state influence (Fuhrman & Elmore, 1990), that inter-governmental relationships need not fit a zero-sum scenario and that the prominent thesis may underestimate the power of the state, we examine an alternative hypothesis--that state activism may constitute a credible threat to local autonomy. We probe the available evidence in an effort to determine whether the state may be influencing schools in multiple ways which, when taken together, significantly restrict the options open to and the degree of

discretion available to site actors. This interpretation is cast as a hypothesis to be tested because the available evidence does not warrant a more definitive position. We explore this alternative hypothesis by using two general trends in state education policymaking as windows for looking at state-site governance relationships. Ironically, the first trend encompasses efforts to "relinquish" state control through various decentralization and de-regulation policies. The second trend encompasses efforts to "reclaim" control, largely, but not solely, through performance standards and related testing requirements and accountability provisions.

Apparent Relinquishing of Power: Decentralization and Deregulation

Resurrected, in part, to correct the imbalance created by the rapid-fire expansions of rules and regulations that marked state responses to the "first" wave of education reform in the early 1980s, efforts to decentralize decisionmaking authority regained prominence in the "second wave" of education reform that occurred in the mid-1980s (Mazzoni, 1994; Fuhrman & Elmore, 1995; Wells & Oakes, 1996) Whether nested in plans to redefine professional roles, in mandates to establish school-improvement teams or in calls to institute site-based governance councils, state governments permitted, encouraged or required schools to establish site based governance bodies (Malen & Ogawa, 1988; James, 1991). Presumably, these bodies would be granted greater decisionmaking authority in the central domains of budget, personnel and program. Even though their formal authority would be circumscribed by the web of rules embedded in existing statutes, regulations, accountability requirements and/or contractual agreements as well as by the availability of resources, the promise was that site actors would have much greater discretion over key aspects of their organization.

In many instances, however, it was extraordinarily difficult to determine what if any new authority sites were granted, let alone whether that newfound authority translated into meaningful increases in organizational discretion (Bimber, 1993; Malen, Ogawa & Kranz, 1990; Whitty, Power, & Halpin, 1998). In other instances, the scope of authority delegated was modest, piecemeal and temporary. In most if not all cases, site autonomy was sharply circumscribed by higher-level rules and scarce resources. State policies that promised to de-regulate schools or to move toward more flexible application of regulation were also weak in scope and impact (Fuhrman & Elmore, 1995). Since demands for school improvement intensified, in part through legislative packages that exacted a price--stronger accountability for the promise of increased autonomy--the "bottom line" seemed to be a substantial, sustained increase in site responsibility but not a substantial, dependable expansion of site autonomy (Malen, et al., 1990; Whitty, et al., 1998). These broad claims are briefly illustrated.

Scope and Stability of "New" Authority. Since site autonomy is contingent, in part, on the formal policymaking authority granted schools in key domains of organizational decisionmaking, it is important to sift through the vague and varied efforts to decentralize decisionmaking and to map what "new" authority may have been delegated (Malen, et al., 1990). When such an analysis is carried out, it appears that most moves to decentralize decisionmaking authority to the school level through various site based management policies made minor changes in select domains of decisionmaking (Malen, et al., 1990; Elmore, 1993).

For example, under site based management plans, schools might be given authority over discretionary funds but were rarely given authority over their operating budgets[7] (Odden & Busch, 1998). Likewise, schools might be given some latitude in how existing personnel positions could be allocated but they were rarely given additional posts and were typically required to hire from pre-approved lists. Save for settings that permit school councils to hire and fire their principals, evidence of a fundamental shift in decisionmaking authority in any, let alone all the critical areas of budget, personnel and instructional programming is rare. Even in reputedly exemplar cases such as Kentucky, the "far-reaching policymaking authority" (Russo, 1995:407; Sandridge, et. al., 1996) attributed to schools is more a lengthy list of topics school councils might consider than a clear indication these bodies have significant authority, particularly given the term limits and other dictates that make it hard for site actors to develop any real momentum and that make it clear that their primary role is to advise and recommend actions to others.

Whatever the degree of "new" authority sites may have been granted, the enabling legislation makes it clear that the state (or its designate) can retract powers delegated to schools or otherwise intervene to "apply remedial measures" on schools (Leithwood and Menzies, 1998:333; Weiss, 1995). In June of 1995, the Illinois legislature did just that when it enacted a law that "gave sweeping new powers to a school district management team" (Shipps, 1998:161; Katz, Fine & Simon, 1997). This team works with the mayor and a board of trustees appointed by the mayor, to "determine which schools require intervention; to dismiss, lay off, or reassign any and all personnel in them; and to dissolve elected Local School Councils. They are also empowered to cut costs, privatize work usually performed by employees, and abrogate many collective bargaining agreements" (Shipps, 1998:161). With this action, the "most radical" decentralization experiment in the nation, (i.e., the Chicago school reform) became a most poignant reminder of the ability of the state to institute a re-centralization model. As such, it underscores the temporary and dependent nature of state efforts to decentralize decisionmaking authority. Because decisionmaking authority that has been delegated can be retracted, school autonomy is always contingent on the will of the state.

Rule and Resource Constraints. Since site autonomy is shaped by the web of rules and the availability of resources in the broader context, efforts to decentralize decisionmaking need to be scrutinized to see whether the rules and resources provide opportunities for, or operate as constraints on, site discretion. In some cases, state mandates or district regulations appeared to severely restrict site autonomy. As one review concluded, "for certain schools, increased authority consists solely of being permitted to make recommendations to the central administration" (Summers & Johnson, 1996:76). While there was some evidence of greater autonomy in other instances, even in reputedly exemplar sites and even under "ideal" conditions (White, 1992), the actual authority afforded the site was highly circumscribed by the rules set elsewhere and by the limited money available for technical assistance and program enhancements (White, 1992; Geraci, 1995-96; Sandidge, et al., 1996; Whitty, et al., 1998).

For example, studies of decentralization in Chicago revealed that even though site actors "were working very hard with insufficient resources and authority," the base level of funding for schools was cut. The persistent fiscal crises did "undermine much of the discretionary budget power of the [local school councils]" (Handler, 1998:10) and "forced schools to divert resources from planned improvements into maintenance of previously existing programs" (G. A. Hess, Jr., 1999:81). In other settings schools were granted the power to manage budget reductions, not initiate school improvements (Malen, 1994b).

Since proposals to delegate decisionmaking to school sites tend to be revived during times of intense fiscal stress, decentralization, at least in some contexts, appeared to be a "budget cutting exercise masquerading under the banner of schools getting more control of their own affairs" (Smythe, 1995:172; Malen, 1994b). Further, since these proposals often failed to "fundamentally alter the web of policies, many of which originate not from the local districts but from the state and federal levels within which schools operate, the idea that [site based management] involves decentralization of authority ...to 'the school'" was characterized, by some, as "a convenient fiction that masks considerable ambiguity and disagreement over ... what decisions are supposed to be made at the school-site level" (Elmore, 1993:45; see also, Malen, et al., 1990 and Malen, 1994a). In short, the rule and resource constraints, coupled with the modest delegation of authority suggest that efforts to decentralize decisionmaking did little to enhance site autonomy. As one review put it, "the locus of power remained where it has always been--with school boards, central office staffs, and state authorities" (Paik, et al., 1999:8)

To be sure, there have been some efforts on the part of state governments, to "lift" state rules and regulations, at least for some schools (notably those deemed to be performing well), or to

engage in forms of "differential regulation" that could range from rule waivers to school take-overs (Firestone & Nagle, 1995). Generally viewed as limited initiatives, these state-level exemptions have not significantly enhanced site autonomy for a number of reasons including that schools may be required to go through a fairly labor-intensive, time-consuming process of initiating and justifying requests for exemptions from state regulations (Fuhrman & Elmore, 1995).

Whether other forms of deregulation such as charter schools or choice plans will significantly enhance school autonomy remains an open question.[8] The autonomy granted charter schools varies substantially within districts and across states (Wohlstetter, Wenning & Briggs, 1995; Wells & Research Associates, 1998; Berman, et al., 1998). Since charter schools, at least in theory, trade greater autonomy for stricter accountability (Bierlien & Mulholland, 1994; Whitty, et al., 1998), it will be important to track the manner in which state accountability requirements constrain charter school autonomy.[9] One of the stark realities is that states can influence site autonomy by the obligations as well as by the regulations imposed on schools (Boyne, 1993). Insofar as charter schools are held to stringent standards defined by the broader system, they, like other schools may be confined to figuring out the means to realize ends established elsewhere. As subsequent sections will make clear, such a constriction relegates schools and those who work in them to a subservient, rather than an autonomous position (Bullough & Gitlin, 1994; Strike, 1998).

Delegation of Responsibility v. Extension of Autonomy. While efforts to decentralize decisionmaking did little to enhance site autonomy, they did a lot to shift responsibility for educational improvements from the state, and at times from the district, to schools. For example, schools were given various assignments, such as developing school improvement plans, organizing inservice sessions, revising report cards, sponsoring student recognition programs, arranging tutorial services, implementing curricular frameworks and the like (Malen, et. al., 1990). Since these sorts of tasks, and other responsibilities associated with decentralization of decisionmaking came in addition to, not in lieu of, their prior professional responsibilities, site actors reported being more over-powered than empowered.

Given these developments, it is not surprising that observers of decentralization raised critical questions about "what is being devolved--is it real power, or merely the responsibility for implementing a bigger agenda decided elsewhere, far removed from schools?" (Smythe, 1995:172). Nor is it surprising, given the concurrent state policymaking actions in the areas of curriculum, assessment and accountability, that some observers maintained that "far from shifting power from the center, the reverse is actually happening. Central policymaking groups are actually acquiring more power to determine policy centrally, through guidelines, frameworks

and directions documents, with responsibility being shunted down the line to schools" (Smythe,1995:172; see also Weiler, 1993 and Whitty, et al., 1998).

This interpretation is more stark, certain and monolithic than one we would render, particularly given the variance in state authority structures and local traditions that can interact to create a "crazy quilt of different degrees of state control" (Pipho, 1991:67). Still, it crystallizes a key contention that we examine more closely as we move from our discussion of the relatively modest state efforts to relinquish power to their more aggressive efforts to reclaim power.

Aggressive Reclaiming of Power: Standards & Assessments

In the US as well as in other countries, "decentralization tends to be accompanied by renewed efforts by central state organizations to control schools through both managerialist policies and processes of accountability" (Gordon, 1995:54). That general tendency is one of the hallmarks of the education reform movement of the 1980s and 1990s. Although states passed and publicized various decentralization and deregulation policies, they also expanded and intensified efforts to strengthen their control of schools. Through an "extraordinary eruption" of policy activity (Mazzoni, 1994:53), states added to the volume of obligations and expectations, rules and regulations imposed on schools.[10] Whether they were scooping up ideas from "lighthouse districts" (Pipho, 1991), capitalizing on proposals advanced by issue networks (Mazzoni, 1994; Kirst, 1995b), or importing ideas from other sources, states continued to take an active hand, at times a heavy hand, in virtually every domain of education policy, including curriculum and instruction, assessment and accountability (McDonnell & Fuhrman, 1986; Airisian, 1988; Pipho, 1991; Kirst, 1995a, 1995b). States extended their reach, intensified their rhetoric and bolstered their strategies for "getting results."

To illustrate, many states asserted their interest in domains that had been the province of individual schools and school districts or professional organizations. States chose to hold schools accountable to <u>state-articulated</u> standards through an array of monitoring and sanctioning tactics such as publicizing test scores, labeling and ranking schools, issuing bonuses to "high performing" schools, placing struggling schools on watch-lists, and threatening reconstitution or privatization (Cohen, 1996; Elmore, Abelmann & Fuhrman, 1996).[11] Whether large numbers of states would actually level the ultimate assault on site autonomy and take over large numbers of individual schools or school districts was not entirely clear.[12] But their right to do so was. Thus states sent strong signals. They also took dramatic actions. Under the auspices of stronger accountability and coherent policy, states became more directly and aggressively involved in hiring and firing educators (Manzo, 1998), articulating curriculum content through

various requirements, frameworks and tests (Odden & Marsh, 1988; Toch, 1991; Sheldon & Biddle, 1998), defining school programs through mandates to select from fairly short lists of state-approved options for at-risk students (an action which in turn, regulates the professional development school staffs receive) (Hendrie, 1999a; Johnston & Sandham, 1999), and by issuing sanctions often through publicity but at times through takeovers.[13]

To be sure, not all states were equally active in all aspects of education. But many states were certainly intent on exercising greater control over schools through policies that combined the persuasiveness of high academic standards and the prescriptiveness of curricular frameworks and guidelines with the pressures of high-stakes assessments (Airisian, 1988; McDonnell, 1994; Madaus & O'Dwyer, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 1990). The policies were often packaged and promoted as a form of performance-based accountability wherein states specify the desired outcomes, set the standards of acceptable performance, select the assessment instruments, and determine the rewards and sanctions that could be issued or imposed on schools to engender compliance. At this time, virtually all states are in the process of developing their own renditions of performance-based accountability (Fuhrman, 1999).

Since "demanding particular levels of system wide outcomes has been shown to be an especially effective means of exercising power over organizational action" (Corbett & Wilson, 1991: 106), these developments may be telling indicators of how state activism may affect site autonomy. A small but growing body of evidence suggests that the state standards, curricular guides, testing requirements and accountability policies may be constraining site autonomy in numerous direct and indirect ways (e.g., Tyree, 1993; Page, 1995; Firestone, et al., 1998; Finkelstein, et al., 1998; Malen, 1999). For example, state policies may be influencing the content of the curriculum, the allocation of time, the deployment of personnel, the focus of professional development, the substance and structure of site-level deliberations and decisions, the conceptions of the educational purposes, and the conceptions of legitimate governance roles and relationships. In these, and perhaps other ways, states may be, in Mazzoni's words, "creating a new set of givens"[14] that site actors accede to, but do not agree with. These general observations are briefly illustrated.

Content of Curriculum. Although state initiated curriculum reforms and testing requirements receive mixed reviews[15], there is reason to believe that the combination of curricular standards or frameworks and publicly disseminated test scores do penetrate schools and precipitate adjustments in schools and classrooms (Odden & Marsh, 1988; Berliner & Biddle, 1995). While the effects are not straightforward or uniform, state mandated "instructional policy makes a difference" (Cohen & Ball, 1990:331) for individual teachers (Borko & Elliott, 1999; Cohen, 1991; Wolf & McIver, 1999) and for schools and school districts.

Some teachers adjust their practice, though not always in ways that are congruent with the particular policy (Cohen & Ball, 1990; Sykes, 1990) or in ways that conform to their views (or researchers' views) of best practice (Corbett & Wilson, 1991; Koretz, et al., 1996a, 1996b). Some schools and school districts revise their policies to secure "topical alignments" with state standards (Spillane & Thompson, 1997:187; Firestone, et al., 1998) and/or adjust practices in ways that quickly improve or artificially inflate their test scores (Corbett & Wilson, 1991; Darling-Hammond, 1994; Berliner & Biddle, 1995).[16] Those adjustments occur primarily, but not solely in the subject areas and grade levels that state testing programs target (Elmore, Adelman & Fuhrman, 1996). Over time, these individual and organizational adjustments can substantially alter the content of the curriculum made available to students (Archbald & Porter, 1994; Berliner & Biddle, 1995).

Whether curriculum standards, guidelines and related testing policies can also alter instructional strategies is less clear (Firestone, et.al., 1998). Some case studies of site responses to state policies suggest that "teachers believe they have near total control over their pedagogy but generally lower and more varying control over content" (Archbald & Porter, 1994:30). These data are generally consistent with surveys wherein principals acknowledge the influence of the state, as well as other parties, on curriculum (Ingersoll & Rossi, 1995) and surveys wherein teachers report modest, and at times diminishing control over curriculum policies but considerable discretion over classroom strategies (Anderson, 1994). Other surveys and case studies suggest that "teachers will gear their teaching methods and strategies to the types of performance elicited by standardized tests, particularly when the tests are the basis for important decisions about students or schools" (Darling-Hammond, 1990:343; see also Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Corbett & Wilson, 1991; Smith, 1991; Stetcher & Baron, 1999).

The impact of externally mandated curricular standards, frameworks and assessments can vary within and across schools, but there is evidence these policies, particularly high-stakes testing policies, precipitate changes in schools and classrooms (McDonnell, 1994; McMillan, et al., 1999). The most common effects are changes in the content of the curriculum (Darling-Hammond & Wise, 1985; Firestone, et. al., 1998; McMillan, et.al., 1999) and, in high-stakes settings, changes in the balance of power between state and local units. As Madaus, quoted by McClellan (1989), summarized: "... when you have high-stakes test, the tests eventually become the curriculum....Items that are not emphasized in the test are not emphasized in school. That's a fundamental lesson that cuts across countries and across time... (1989:644; see also, Madaus & O'Dwyer, 1999). For that reason, "the administrative mechanism used to ensure that standards are met [an external test] ... greatly diminishes cherished local control over what is taught and how it is taught and learned" (Madaus, 1988:111).

Given the power of tests, states may be able to wield influence not only by what they require, but also by what they do not require. The recent decision to eliminate theories of evolution from state tests in Kansas provides a telling opportunity to see whether states significantly influence curriculum by what they omit, as well as by what they include in their required tests (Washington Post, 1999).

Yet another opportunity for states to influence the content of curriculum may occur when states require that schools select textbooks from a state-approved list (Pipho, 1991). Writing about textbook adoptions processes in Texas and California, DelFattore points out that "Requiring publishers to produce charts showing how each textbook correlates with [state] guidelines .... puts publishers on notice that their books had better conform as closely as possible to the curricula of those states" (1992:123). Publishers respond to these pressures because Texas and California are the nation's two most lucrative textbook markets. Accommodations made for these states have ramifications for curriculum content in other states because more often than not, companies publish only one edition of a major text (Delfattore, 1992; Cooper, 1999). Thus, state influence on curriculum may be quite subtle, but it may also be quite extensive.

Allocation of Time. One of the recurring effects of the state mandated standards and testing policies seems to be shifts in the use of time--by teachers, administrators and support staff. Some teachers reportedly invest considerable time preparing for and teaching to tests, particularly in high-stakes settings (Firestone, et al., 1998; McMillan, et al., 1999) Surveys and observations of elementary teachers in Chicago demonstrate that increasing numbers of teachers (from 44% in 1994 to 65% in 1997-98) are spending increasing amounts of time (from about 12 hours in 1994 to over 50 hours in 1997-98) on preparation for the state standardized tests (Smith, 1998, see also, Wong, et. al., 1999; Hendrie, 1999b). These teachers reallocate their preparation and teaching time even though they are concerned about the ability to cover the required curriculum, let alone deal with what we term the "preferred curriculum", that is, what teachers would like to teach and view as important to teach. In Florida, administrators talk about getting their teachers to spend about six weeks each year "prepping" or coaching students for the state's standardized examination (Toch, 1991:221). Although educators in these and other settings may question the wisdom of such adaptations, they seem less inclined to question the necessity of them (Toch, 1991; Firestone, et. al., 1998; McMillan, et al., 1998).

These examples parallel the findings of surveys and interviews of administrators and teachers in Maryland. Here surveys indicate that schools and schools districts "seemed to be devoting more administrative and teacher time to devising strategies to improve scores [on the state tests]" (Corbett & Wilson, 1988:34). Follow-

up visits corroborate that administrators in some settings "were planning expedient strategies for improving the test scores quickly," even though they resented having to do so and were concerned that "what they were doing was compromising a standard of good professional practice" (Corbett & Wilson, 1991:96). These patterns suggest that "the opportunity costs of time spent testing and preparing students for tests are considerable" (Madaus, in McClellan 1989:643), even in settings where site actors may be acceding to the pressures for improved test scores rather than agreeing with those priorities (Corbett & Wilson, 1991; Toch, 1991; Finkelstein, et al., 1998; Malen, et al., 1999).

Deployment of Personnel. The combination of state policies, particularly standards and accountability policies, not only prompts adjustments in the content of curriculum and the allocation of time inside and outside the classroom, but also precipitates changes in how human resources are configured and utilized. For example, an in progress study of site responses to reconstitution illustrates how state testing and accountability pressures are contributing to changes in the work assignments and priorities of employees. Here, a district, under intense pressure from the state to improve its performance, as measured by the state's tests, launched a reconstitution initiative of its own. In this context, pressure to perform well on state assessments is intense (Finkelstein, et al., 1998). Some reconstituted schools have responded to that pressure by (a) dedicating positions to testing coordinators and to persons who might be especially skilled in helping teachers prepare students for the tests, (b) using substitute teachers to relieve classroom teachers so they can develop practice packets and conduct practice sessions with groups of students in hopes that they will be more ready for the state tests, and (c) making improvement of test scores a main, if not the main priority for resource teachers and specialists as well as for classroom teachers and school principals (Malen, et al., 1999; Malen, 1999). Other studies also document how schools can be persuaded and pressured to "redirect personnel and ... [target] resources on activities specifically linked to raising test scores," even in settings where site educators resist and resent these reallocations (Wong & Anagmostopoulos, 1998:46; Stetcher & Baron, 1999).

Focus of Professional Development. In some contexts, state standards and testing policies may be shaping how professional development resources are configured and invested. The in progress study of site responses to reconstitution suggests that issues associated with the state testing program permeate the professional development agenda and consume much of the available time set aside for inservice sessions (Finkelstein, et al., 1998; Malen, 1999). These findings echo the observations of others who report that "Districts in Maryland focused their professional development resources on helping teachers align their instruction with the [state assessments]" (Firestone, et. al., 1998: 110) or claim that

"Most of their [local educators] professional time became devoted to test-related activities, to the exclusion of other staff development and improvement initiatives" (Corbett & Wilson, 1991:103). While that tendency was more widespread in some contexts than others, it was evident in both high-stake and lower-stake states (e.g., Maryland, a high-stakes setting and Pennsylvania, a lower-stakes setting).

As earlier noted, some states are beginning to require schools to select programs for at risk students from lists of approved vendors. These choices often determine who will provide professional development services at the site. As the early Rand study demonstrated, external consultants can be influential orchestrators of organizational change processes (McLaughlin, 1990). Insofar as states directly or indirectly limit the list of approved vendors to agents that reinforce state policies and priorities, they may be carving out another channel for exercising influence on the site and creating another mechanism for reducing the degree of discretion afforded the site.

Substance and Structure of Site-level Deliberations and Decisions. Analyses of school improvement plans and observations of school-wide planning activities suggest site-level deliberations focus on and are framed by templates that are clearly rooted in and reflective of state requirements (Advocates for Children & Youth, 1998; Finkelstein, et al., 1998). Site participants tend to accept the items on the template as the topics they ought to consider. Thus the template becomes a vehicle for pre-structuring conversations, for creating the impression that the template is what they must rely on in their planning and decisionmaking even though it fails to capture aspects of school improvement that teachers and administrators identify in private interviews, as more salient to them and more sensible for their school.

Insofar as state policies are wending their way to schools through various templates and guidelines that define the topics and terms of professional discussions, determine the parameters and priorities of professional deliberations and shape the premises and pre-conditions for collective decisions, the state is exercising considerable power over the site. As Morgan explains, "...much unobtrusive control is built into vocabularies, structures of communication, attitudes, beliefs, rules and procedures that, though unquestioned, exert a decisive influence on decision [premises and] outcomes" (1986:166). And, as Pfeffer makes clear in his discussion of sources of power in organizational decisionmaking, "decisions are, in large measure, determined by the premises used in making them." The agents that can establish the premises can, "in effect determine the decision" (1981:116).

Conceptions of the Primary Purposes of Schooling. Studies of responses to state standards and accountability policies illustrate how these policies may take on a normative force that affects not

only the content of the curriculum and the allocation of resources but also conceptions of the primary purposes of schooling. Beyond becoming "the Bible on what we have to teach (Firestone, et al., 1998: 108), these policies may alter views about even more foundational aspects of the organization. In one study, for example, "a shift occurred from educators viewing the test as one indicator among many to their treating the next set of test results as the most important outcome of schooling....Thus, the indicator of performance becomes the goal itself" (Corbett & Wilson, 1991: 104,105). Whether this sort of goal transformation or goal substitution is prevalent or inevitable is an empirical question. What the "threads of evidence" (Knapp, 1997:227) suggest is that state policies, particularly testing and accountability policies may be intentionally or inadvertently altering site actors conceptions of the primary purposes of schools.

Some argue that is precisely what ought to occur. The state should be determining the ends and the standards by which those ends are assessed while districts and sites should be determining the means through which those goals and objectives can be realized. While that is not the only view of educational governance that is being promoted, it is a prominent one that serves to illustrate yet another avenue through which the state may be influencing schools in ways that constrain the autonomy of the site.

Conceptions of Legitimate Roles and Relationships. As policy analysts and actors sought to reconcile or rationalize how states could be simultaneously promoting and passing centralizing and decentralizing reforms, one definition of state and local authority relationships became fairly prevalent. As Wells and Oakes (1996) described the process, states would be creating "centralized standards, curricular frameworks, and assessment programs while encouraging decentralized decision making through which local schools design and implement strategies for teaching the frameworks and meeting the standards for student outcomes" (Wells & Oakes, 1996:135). Upper level governments (federal and state) were to set standards, disseminate frameworks and develop assessments and "schools and their communities were to be granted the autonomy to implement the frameworks as they saw fit while being held accountable for student outcomes as measured against the standards, frameworks, and tests" (Wells & Oakes, 1996:135). Presumably such a division of responsibility would engender greater coherence in the education policy system and improve the performance of schools (Smith & O'Day 1991; O'Day & Smith, 1993).

While judging the merits of this definition of inter-governmental relations falls beyond the scope of this paper, gauging its impact on site autonomy does not. What seems clear is that, under this definition, site autonomy is severely constrained because all schools have the freedom to do is to figure out how to meet the goals set elsewhere and measure up to the standards set elsewhere (Bullough & Gitlin, 1994). As Strike writes:

> "[Under such an arrangement] the what of education ... is determined largely by the state....[Such an approach] substantially restricts the opportunities for local schools to amend centrally defined curricula or to engage in local deliberations about their content. Moreover, the deliberations of local schools become focused on implementation of state curricula, on means, not ends" (1998:209).

A "New Set of Givens." When we array the multiple ways that state policy may be influencing critical aspects of schools, it seems that states may be creating what Mazzoni has called a "new set of givens." This "new set of givens" may be influencing what site actors think as well as what they do. As the preceding paragraphs suggest, state policies along with the district reactions they spawn may be influencing the orientations and actions of site participants by persuading or pressuring schools to make adjustments in core aspects of the organization, by shaping, if not fully framing, site actors' perceptions of problems, priorities and possibilities and by modifying their responses to them. There is evidence that state policies may be able to infiltrate, if not fully control the agendas at the site, to define the decision situation in ways that site actors reluctantly, at times inadvertently accept, and to extract concessions even though site actors may openly express their displeasure with, at times disdain for, the accommodations they make.[17] These patterns suggest that the aggregate effect of state policies, particularly in the area of standards and accountability may be to rewrite "the rules of the game" (Mazzoni, 1991:116).

Insofar as the state policies are precipitating adjustments not only in key aspects of the organization but also in underlying constructions or "visions of what the problems and issues are and how they can be tackled," (Morgan, 1986:166), the state has secured a potent power advantage because the underlying views "often act as mental straitjackets that prevent us from seeing other ways of formulating our basic concerns and the alternative courses of action that are available" (Morgan, 1986:116). Insofar as the organizational and conceptual adjustments mirror the preferences embodied in state policies, the state may be infusing and reinforcing a "new set of givens" that directly and indirectly restrict the degree of autonomy afforded site actors.

A Provisional Reappraisal of State Activism and Site Autonomy

Our analysis suggests that one of the major, cumulative effects of the proliferation and intensification of state policymaking may well be to substantially constrain site autonomy. Our review of state efforts to "relinquish" power and strengthen the autonomy of schools indicates that the formal authority delegated to sites was at best modest and temporary; that the web of rules and regulations, the intensification of expectations and

obligations and the limited availability of resources interacted to further constrain the discretion afforded schools. Ironically, despite the state emphasis on decentralization and deregulation, it seems that sites inherited a great deal of responsibility, but they did not secure additional autonomy. Our review of state efforts to "reclaim" power and exert greater control over schools illustrates that states have repeatedly and resolutely crossed the boundaries of modest and intermittent involvement in select domains of education and moved toward aggressive and persistent intervention in multiple domains of education, including those traditionally seen as falling within the purview of local units. At least in some contexts, state policies appear to be penetrating schools, shaping site priorities and practices, and precipitating changes despite site actors' reluctance, resentment and resistance. Through various combinations of symbols, sanctions, rules, regulations, and exhortations, state policies seem to be creating "a new set of givens" that limit the latitude of site actors.

Taken together, the illusion of relinquishing power and the pattern of reclaiming power lend credence to the idea that education policymaking may be largely "rigged from the top" (Fischer,1990:288). While that interpretation stands in sharp contrast to the prevalent view that education policy is essentially "made" or "remade" at the bottom, it is a plausible, albeit provisional, interpretation that captures key features of what seems to be an emerging redefinition of state-local roles, relationships and responsibilities.

In part because states have essentially controlled the education reform agenda and effectively concentrated their symbolic, regulatory and fiscal resources on "results-based" accountability ventures, sites have been relegated to a reactive, arguably subservient role in that they are being required to meet the goals developed elsewhere with the resource allocations determined elsewhere or experience the sanctions set elsewhere. Although some schools may still be able to insulate themselves from the influence of state policies, it appears that the balance of power has shifted. Schools are the clear targets and the reluctant recipients of a host of state initiatives that tend to make schools assume substantial responsibility for reform outcomes but grant them little opportunity to influence reform inputs. While sites may appear to be ingeniously eluding or defying the steady influx of state directives, they also appear to be maneuvering within the relatively narrow and apparently narrowing parameters set by the states.

To be clear, we are not arguing that the broad array of forces which can intervene to dilute or derail policies as they move from state enactment to site implementation no longer comes into play. In all likelihood, organizational layers, local cultures, policy features, actor dispositions and other factors such as the complexity of educational problems, will continue to complicate and

confound state efforts to control schools. What we are suggesting however, is that states may be consolidating their power---controlling organizational agendas, reconstructing the rules of the game, and otherwise influencing site-level decisions and operations in multiple, consequential ways which, when taken together, significantly restrict the options open to and the degree of discretion available to site actors.

While our analysis provides support for this alternative hypothesis, our interpretation must be seen as tentative on several counts. First, our analysis concentrates on only two broad trends in education policymaking. While developments in these prominent domains of education policy can be instructive, they are not conclusive. The relationship between state activism and site autonomy may look quite different when examined through the window of education policy developments in other domains such as teacher education, professional development and licensure requirements, and education finance legislation and litigation.

Second, our analysis recognizes that state policy is only one of many forces that can enhance or restrict site autonomy. But, we do not elaborate how these "other factors" operate or how they might mediate the influence of state policies on the "degrees of freedom" found in schools. As earlier noted, schools are nested in multi-level governmental systems and complex social, cultural and political contexts that can reinforce or counteract state policies. Given data and space limitations, we do not explicitly address the forces that may be magnifying or minimizing the impact of state policies. For that reason, our analysis may distort the impact of state policy on site autonomy.[18]

Third, our analysis focuses only on the nature of the state-site governance relationship. We sought to uncover the potential connections between state activism and site autonomy, not weigh all the conceivable consequences of them. The emphasis was on understanding if and how state activism may be affecting the balance of power between states and sites, not assessing how changes in that balance might affect other important matters, such as the prospects for educational improvements or the distribution of educational benefits.

Implications for Future Research

The shortcomings in our analysis that we have noted, as well as others that could be added, indicate that there is considerable work to be done if we want to get a clearer understanding of the relationship between state activism and school autonomy. To begin, we need to develop a stronger data base. We need more multi-level, longitudinal looks at how state education policies make their way to and through the system, interact with other forces and operate, over time, to shape the autonomy of schools. Mapping these dynamics across levels and over time is an essential step in

"developing a reasonable web of causal influences that help us understand not only what happened but why it happened that way" (Huberman & Miles, 1984:1).

We also need more integrated looks at how state actions within and across key domains of education policy play out in various contexts. Such work could reveal how clusters of policies combine and interact to shape the opportunity structure within which site actors make decisions and take actions. In addition, we need more penetrating looks that get at the obvious and the unobtrusive, the regulatory and the symbolic processes that may be operating as states actively and aggressively seek to influence schools. And, we need more comprehensive looks that get at how changes in governance relationships may affect the capacity and the resolve required to improve the quality of life and learning for those who live and work in our schools.[19] While such a program of research would be conceptually, empirically and logistically ambitious, it could enable us to get a more complete picture of the aggregate and cumulative impact of state activism on site autonomy.

1. We express our gratitude to Patricia Marin, our research assistant, who diligently tracked, secured and organized much of the literature we read to prepare this chapter. We thank Ed Andrews, Sydney Farivar, Barbara Finkelstein, Frances Fowler, Tim Mazzoni, Lise Reilly and Jennifer Rice for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

2. When compared with other organizations, public schools have less to say about key aspects of organizational life such as "decisions about the business to be in...the kinds of labour to be employed and how that labour is compensated...[and] the clients to be served..." (Davies & Hentschke, 1994:99-101). When looking at the interdependent units of the education system, it is hard to tell where specific decisions are really lodged. Still, the indicators used here should help detect the degree of discretion schools possess and track if/how that discretion has changed over time.

3. Even in settings where careful studies have been conducted over several years, it may be difficult to sort out the key actors involved in creating policies let alone the major effects of those policies on site autonomy. As Danielson and Hothschild (1998), in their summary interpretation of seventeen case studies of education reform in urban and metropolitan settings, express it: "...school boards have relatively minor policy roles everywhere, as do parents and community organizations. But other interactions follow no common patterns; the roles of superintendents, teachers' unions, legislative bodies, corporations, mayors, federal courts, and state education officials range from featured player to bit part in different places and at different times in the same place" (1998:277). How such fluid political contexts shape the autonomy

afforded schools is rarely the major focus of education policy studies.

4. The reasons for the variance in state policymaking are not addressed here. Our point is simply that "No two states are likely to have identical experiences [in either the selection or implementation of education policies]. While patterns exist, variation in policy and process persists" (Fuhrman, 1988:64).

5. We are indebted to Frances Fowler for pointing out that at times we situate the district with the site as if these levels were both elements of local control, and, at other times we situate the district with the state as if they were both elements of centralized control. While conceptually messy, our treatment of the district reflects the multiple, pivitol roles districts may play. It also illustrates the importance of developing a stronger basis for clarifying the role of the district in education policy initiation and implementation (Spillane, 1996). But that task falls well beyond the scope of this chapter.

6. The conclusion that state policies were not very influential in these contexts may be in part, an artifact of how questions were asked. For example, informants were asked to identify the two most important local issues during past 3 years and explain why they have been important. They were also asked to identify the greatest success in the district in the last 3 years and indicate how it was achieved (Hess, 1999: 90, 92).

7. Writing about site-based management plans in 1998, Odden and Busch note that "No state, even of the several that have endorsed strong school-based management, has proposed...that the bulk of education funds be budgeted to the school in a lump sum or described how such a new education finance structure would work..." (1998:131). Information shared at a School Development Conference held in New York during July of 1999 indicates that some schools in New Jersey may be given the responsibility for handling their operating budget as well as their discretionary funds. It is also possible that some charter schools may also have more budgetary authority than was typically granted schools under site based management plans.

8. While we do not have the space to review the data on charter schools and choice plans, we think it is important to examine the actual autonomy schools have under these arrangements. Just as there is reason to question whether charter schools have greater autonomy in determining educational ends and means, there is reason to raise those issues with some choice plans. For example, Handler draws on studies of deregulation in Minnesota, New York and Washington to illustrate how "educational choice policy, although touted as 'deregulating' education--that is substituting the discipline of market incentives for external regulation--actually

is a substitution of one regulatory regime for another" (Handler, 1998:110).

9. We are indebted to Jennifer Rice for helping us see that the literature on charter schools does not critically appraise the trade-off between autonomy and accountability or explicitly focus on the crux of the issue--that strict accountability constrains site autonomy.

10. States had been "on the move" in education policymaking for some time (Kirst, 1995b: 45). Still, the scope and degree of involvement picked up noticeably as states experienced a host of pressures to make schools work (Mazzoni, 1994).

11. For a very concrete example, see the Maryland State Department of Education advertisement in Education Week, May 17, 1999, page 9. This ad is seeking to locate vendors who are interested in assuming "third party management" roles in schools the state may reconstitute.

12. In several locations (e.g., New Jersey, Connecticut, California), select school districts were "taken over" by the state. Estimates suggest that about twenty one districts "have had control transferred from an elected board and its choice of a superintendent to a mayor, a state legislature or an appointed oversight board" (Green, 1999:4). In other states (e.g., Maryland) no schools have been taken over but many are designated as "reconstitution eligible" sites. Approximately twenty-three states have laws that explicitly call for the state, or their designate to take control of low-performing schools; about eleven states have "made good on their promise to do so" (White, 1999:11).

13. At times local actors have challenged state actions. They have fought back. For example, when two teachers were "fired by the state board after a state assistance team assigned to the school found their performance inadequate" local authorities rehired the teachers but assigned them to other schools (Manzo, 1998:9). Quite apart from local responses to them, such dramatic examples of state activism illustrate how state governments have been crossing conventional boundaries of professional discretion, limited intervention and local control.

14. The phrase was coined by Tim Mazzoni in a telephone conversation about this chapter.

15. Many discuss a range of issues associated with various testing policies and practices through their studies, commentaries and histories of the development and use of tests in education. See, for example, Sheldon and Biddle (1998), Baron and Wolfe, (1996), Berliner and Biddle (1995), Page (1995), Darling-Hammond (1994), Madaus and O'Dwyer (1999) and Resnick and Resnick (1985).

16. To elaborate, "Schools where test scores are used for making decisions about rewards and sanctions have found ways to manipulate their test taking population in order to inflate artificially the school's average test scores. These strategies include labelling large numbers of low-scoring students for special education placements so that their scores won't 'count' in school reports, retaining students in grade so that their relative standing will look better on 'grade-equivalent' scores, excluding low-scoring students from admission to 'open enrollment' schools, and encouraging such students to leave schools or drop out" (Darling-Hammond, 1994:15). In some settings, "pressures of accountability have led some educators to cheat" be that through administrators "quietly distributing tests to teachers ahead of time," or through other questionable practices such as teaching a restricted curriculum, exempting low-achieving children and reporting fraudulent results (Berlinger & Biddle, 1995: 198).

17. To be clear, the concerns expressed by site actors go beyond irritation and frustration. Some educators question whether the state standards and assessments are appropriate for their students and resent what seems to them to be state "intrusion" on professional autonomy (Toch, 1991; Malen, et al., 1999; Firestone, et al., 1998; Corbett & Wilson, 1991).

18. For a discussion of how superficial attention to contextual forces can operate to both underestimate and overestimate the influence of central authorities, see Boyne, 1993.

19. Scholars who have pursued this line of work offer very different judgments. Some suggest that state education policy may be misguided; that it has adopted the wrong strategies. For example, it may be that the illusion of greater autonomy and the intensity of performance-based accountability create a context wherein schools are allocated "the blame for failure rather than the freedom to succeed" (Whitty, et. al.,1998:12). Others suggest state education policy misses the mark, that it fails to address the underlying conditions of racial, social and economic equity that must be ameliorated in order to secure meaningful and enduring improvements in education (e.g., Anyon, 1997; Lipman, 1997). Others add that state education reforms, like reform initiatives that emanate from other sources may direct attention away from those critical issues (Anyon, 1997; Lewis & Nakagawa, 1995; Hess, 1999). On a more hopeful note, some argue that education reforms can be effectively integrated and that they can evolve into a blend of state direction and site discretion that will ultimately engender school improvement (e.g., Smith & O'Day, 1991; Fuhrman,1993).

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